

# Great Lakes VA Healthviews

*The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12*



Volume 1, Issue 2

Spring 2003

Welcome to the second issue of the VISN 12 Patient Education Newsletter. In the first issue, you were asked to submit ideas for a newsletter name. What a response! More than 70 different names were received. And many veterans sent in more than one idea for a name!

As you can see, the new name is Great Lakes VA Healthviews. The name reflects the intent of the newsletter. It provides information on health related topics to veterans in VISN 12, which is the Great Lakes region. Congratulations are extended to Rev. Harold A. Hein from South Elgin, IL, for submitting the winning name!

Rev. Hein is a World War II veteran who served in the U.S. Navy from June 1944 to July 1946. He was a "Seabee," which means that he worked in a Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit in the Navy. While in the Navy, he received a calling to go into pastoral ministry. After graduating from the seminary in 1952, he and his wife served as missionaries in West Africa for 12 years. After that, Rev. Hein served as the pastor of a Lutheran church in Texas. He has lived in Illinois since 1995.

Rev. Hein related that his three brothers were in the Army in WWII. "Mom was a four-star mother!" he exclaimed. His older brother was wounded twice in the Philippines. Rev. Hein stated that his brother spoke favorably of the help that the VA provided for his disability.

Today, Rev. Hein receives his primary care at the Elgin Clinic. He is grateful for the service and helpful personnel at the Elgin Clinic and at Hines. Finally, he commented that he enjoyed the first newsletter and read it from cover to cover.

Thanks again, Rev. Hein, and all the veterans, for submitting names of the newsletter. Also, thank you for the many letters submitted on ideas for future articles. This issue has an "Ask the Expert" question that was submitted. Future issues will have articles on topics that you asked for. Feel free to send in other ideas for health related articles. Remember, this newsletter is for you, the veteran!

Kathleen A. Ford, MSN, RN  
Senior Editor

# Ten Steps to Safer Health Care

by Craig Renner, Patient Safety Officer  
William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital  
Madison, WI

The VA has lead the way in providing quality and safety in health care. One example of patient safety is when the doctor orders medicines in the computer. Typewritten orders are easier to read than hand-written. Another example is using barcodes. By scanning the barcode on the patient ID band and on the medicine package, errors can be lessened. The nurse gets the right medicine to the right patient at the right time.

Sometimes the unexpected can occur when patients and doctors have problems talking to each other. A recent study showed that when patients were not involved and informed in their health care, they were less likely to follow their treatment plans. They did not do what was needed for their treatment to work.

Below are ten steps that you can do to promote safer health care.

1. The single most important step you can take is to be an active partner in your health care. That means taking part in every decision about your health care.
2. Speak up if you have questions or concerns. It's okay to ask questions. AND you should expect answers that you can understand. Ask a family member or friend to be there with you.
3. Make sure your doctor or nurse confirms your identity. Before receiving any medicines or treatment, be sure your provider asks your name and social security number, or checks your wristband. During your stay in the hospital, please inform your nurse if you are not wearing an ID wristband. This is an important part of ensuring patient safety.
4. Hand washing is the most important way to stop the spread of infection. Speak up if you notice that a member of your care team has not washed their hands. It is okay to offer a reminder.

5. Keep a list of all medicines you take. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about the medicines that you take. This includes over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin and ibuprofen. It also includes any dietary supplements, vitamins, minerals and herbs. Also tell them about any drug allergies you have.
6. Ask the pharmacist about side effects of medicines. Also ask what food or other things to avoid while taking the medicine. When you get your medicine, read the label, including warnings. Make sure it is what the doctor ordered and you know how to use it. Ask for information in terms you can understand, both when your medicines are prescribed and when you receive them.
7. Make sure you get results of any test or procedure. Ask your doctor or nurse when and how you will get the results of tests or procedures. If you do not get them as expected, don't assume the results are fine. Call and ask for them.
8. Know that "more" is not always better. It is a good idea to find out why a test or treatment is needed and how it could help you.
9. Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery. Make sure you, your doctor, and your surgeon all agree on exactly what will be done during the operation. Make sure you have a mark on your skin showing the correct place of the surgery. Tell the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and nurses if you have allergies. Also tell them if you have ever had a bad reaction to anesthesia.
10. When you are being discharged from the hospital, ask your doctor to explain the treatment plan you will use at home. This includes learning about your medicines and finding out when you can get back to your regular activities.

By getting involved and asking questions, you can promote safety in your care. For more information, go to the following website: [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

# **VISN 12 Telephone Care Service**

Patricia A. Otterson RN-C

William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital

Madison, WI

## **History of Telephone Care at the Madison VA**

In April of 1994, the Madison VA Hospital began the process of centralizing phone calls from eligible veterans or their caregivers. The goal was to help our patients get connected to the RIGHT level of care at the RIGHT time. We started with one General Medicine Clinic and gradually added clinics until all were included in the Telephone Care Program.

## **History of Telephone Care for VISN 12**

Between 1994 and today, the program has grown into the VISN 12 Telephone Care Service. Each hospital in VISN 12 has their own Telephone Care Program during daytime hours. However, during non-daytime hours, as well as week-ends and holidays, the Madison VA receives ALL incoming calls for VISN 12.

## **What happens when I call Telephone Care?**

Whether you call during the day or night, the same process occurs. A specially trained Registered Nurse asks you about your symptoms. A series of questions are asked based on established guidelines. The questions help the nurse determine how serious your symptoms are. It is important to answer the questions as completely as possible. This ensures that the nurse can give you the best possible advice. Finally, the nurse advises you on the best course of action. The nurse may advise you to call 911 or the nurse may suggest how you can best handle the symptoms at home.

If you are having a life threatening emergency always call 911 or your local emergency service. At other times, call with your health concerns before you come to the clinic, Emergency Room or Urgent Care. The nurse may be able to help you manage your concern over the telephone or help you to manage your symptoms with home care advice. This may prevent a needless trip to the hospital.

The nurses are not able to answer questions about symptoms a family member or friend is having. They are not able to advise you about federal or state benefits either.

## What is different about calling during after-hours?

During after-hours the nurse asks the same questions about your symptoms as during the day. The nurse also gives the same type of advice. The care you get is the same whether you call during the day or after-hours. What is different is that the nurses are not allowed to transfer calls to patient rooms or to other areas of the various hospitals served by the after-hours program. This is so that the phone lines can be kept open for patients who may be having life threatening symptoms such as strokes, heart attacks or other serious health problems.

They are also not able to schedule or cancel appointments. This needs to be done during regular business hours, 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., Monday through Friday. Regular prescription refills also need to be handled during regular business hours.

The Telephone Care Service in VISN 12 has grown over the years. This service is here to assure that you, our veteran patient, get the best possible care.

### Phone Numbers for Telephone Care in VISN 12

Facility	Telephone Care Phone Number
VA Chicago Heath Care System	1-800-591-4815
Tomah VA	1-800-USA-TOMAH or 1-800-872-8662, ext 61177
North Chicago VA	847-578-6920 or 1-800-393-0865 or 847-688-1900, ext 86920
Milwaukee VA	1-888-469-6614
Madison VA	1-888-598-7793 or 608-280-7066
Hines VA	708-202-3800 <b>Please note:</b> This is a NEW number for Hines.
Iron Mountain VA	During regular business hours, call the main hospital number, 906-774-3300, and contact the nurse in the specific clinic. After normal business hours, weekends and holidays, call: 906-774-3300, ext 32512.

# HOME CARE

## ORDER

### Home Sweet (and Safe) Home

Ann Doubek, RN, FNP

Program Director, HBPC, Hines VA Hospital

by the Staff of the Home Care Program

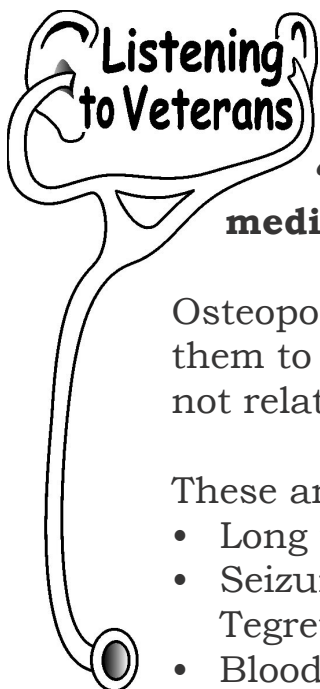
Whether you're 8, 18 or 80, everyone would like to make their home as safe as possible. As people age, however, home safety requires special attention to prevent accidents and injuries. More than 700,000 people older than 65 are treated in the emergency department each year for injuries related to products they live with and use everyday. To help reduce accidents, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has these useful tips.

- Check all electrical and telephone cords to be sure that no one can trip over them.
- Remove rugs and runners that tend to slide. Check all rugs, runners and mats to be sure they have slip-resistant backing that is in good condition.
- Inspect space heaters to be sure they cannot be knocked over. Keep them away from flammable materials and furnishings, such as curtains, rugs or newspaper.
- Check the kitchen for towels, curtains or other things close to the stove that might catch fire.
- Avoid wearing clothing with long, loose fitting sleeves while you are cooking. They can catch fire or get caught on pot handles.
- Keep a step stool handy that is in good repair. Avoid standing on chairs, boxes or other unstable items. If you need a new stool, consider buying one with a handrail.
- Have furnaces and fireplaces checked every year.
- Make sure your tub and shower area have non-slip surfaces and grab bars fixed securely to the wall. Do not use towel bars or sinks to pull yourself up. They are not strong enough and can be pulled right out of the wall.

By taking time to follow these tips, you could prevent an injury or accident to yourself or others in your home. To prevent injuries, you need to practice good safety habits.

**For year round safety information call: (770) 218-0071 or go on-line to <http://www.safeamerica.org>**





## Ask An Expert

**“I am especially interested in knowing what certain medicines may contribute to osteoporosis if one takes them?”**

Osteoporosis is a disease where bones become weak and thin causing them to break easily. Ten million Americans have this disease. It is not related to gender although females usually are the most at risk.

These are some drugs that may cause bone loss:

- Long term use of steroids such as Prednisone
- Seizure pills such as Dilantin® (phenytoin) or Tegretol® (carbamazepine)
- Blood thinners such as heparin
- Thyroid drugs
- Lithium
- Nolvadex® (Tamoxifen)
- Aluminum containing drugs, such as Maalox®
- Cancer treatments such as methotrexate or cyclosporine
- Cigarettes
- Alcohol

It is important to remember if you are taking any of these drugs to be aware of the potential for thinning bones. In our first Newsletter we covered the treatment of osteoporosis and what things you can do to prevent fractures.

For other information please speak to your provider and pharmacist.

For those who use the web, try some of these helpful sites:

National Osteoporosis Foundation at [www.nof.org](http://www.nof.org)

The Osteoporosis Resource Centers at [www.osteorec.com](http://www.osteorec.com)

National Institute on Aging at [www.nia.nih.gov/health](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health)

Answered by:

C. Lance Davis, PharmD

Associate Chief Pharmacy Service

Madison VA Medical Center

*Your best source for information on your health will always be your doctor or health care provider. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to talk to your health care provider and ask questions about your health concerns.*

### **Main Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals**

Hines: 708-202-VETS (8387)  
Iron Mountain: 906-774-3300  
Madison: 608-256-1901  
Milwaukee: 414-384-2000 or 1-888-469-6614  
North Chicago: 1-800-393-0865 or 847-688-1900  
Tomah: 1-800-USA-TOMAH, 1-800-872-8662, or 608-372-3971  
VA Chicago: 312-569-VETS (8387)

### **“Ask An Expert” Question or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed, mailed, or faxed to the Senior Editor.  
E-mail address: SrEditorGreatLakesVAHealthviews@med.va.gov  
Mailing address: Kathleen Ford, Hines VA Hospital, Mail Route 152,  
5th and Roosevelt Road, Hines, IL 60141  
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